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Graduate Admissions Overview for Associate/Assistant Deans

CGS New Deans Institute
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Graduate Admissions: Differences across institutions

- Requirements and Criteria
 - Required documents and test scores
 - Prerequisites and minimum standards
 - Selectivity
- Admissions processes and timelines
 - Key decision makers
 - Rolling admissions vs. collective review
 - Deadlines
 - International transcript evaluation and visa processing
- Organizational structure
 - Centralized vs. decentralized vs. collaborative



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Graduate Student Recruitment

- 38% decentralized
 - 21% at the school/college level
 - 17% decentralized to the department/program level

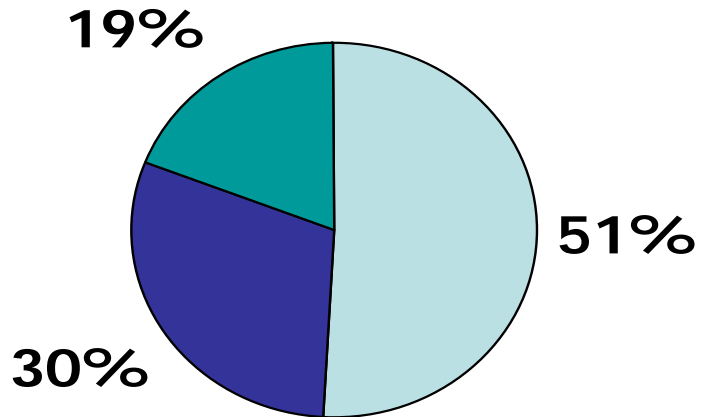
- 35% centralized
 - 21% highly centralized (all graduate recruitment within single office)
 - 14% primarily centralized (all but one or two specific fields, such as law and/or medicine, handled by a single office)

- 27% collaborative
 - Joint effort by central administration and schools; schools and programs; or by all levels

Source: 2003 NAGAP Survey of Member Organizational Structures



Graduate Admissions -- Processing

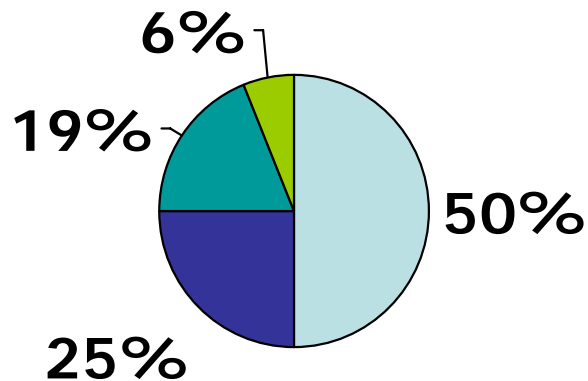


- Highly or primarily centralized
- Decentralized to schools or departments
- Collaborative

Source: 2003 NAGAP Survey of Member Organizational Structures



International Credential Evaluation

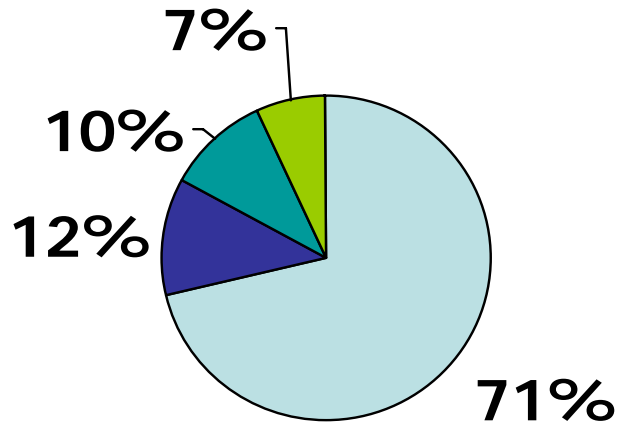


- Same office as domestic credentials
- Professional credentialing agency
- International admissions/services office
- Other

Source: 2003 NAGAP Survey of Member Organizational Structures



Graduate Admissions Decisions



- Faculty within academic department
- Admissions staff
- Other (faculty & staff jointly, varies by department)
- Academic dean (e.g., Dean of Graduate Studies)



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Fellowship and Assistantship Decisions

- 50% made within the student's academic program (chair or other faculty)
- Other decisionmakers:
 - multiple offices or committees (19%)
 - academic dean (14%)
 - admissions dean/director (10%)
 - university-wide financial aid or fellowship officer (5%)
- 2% don't provide any institutional funding



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“Prior to five years ago, recruitment for graduate programs and admissions paper work were centralized under enrollment services, and individual program directors made decisions about admitting an individual. Then the decision was made to decentralize as much as possible. Each school was responsible for its own marketing and recruitment; some schools took over the whole admissions process, while others had enrollment services continue handling the paper work. Now the university is changing back to a centralized format. Over the past 16 years, I have gone through this four times.”

*Patricia Callahan, Director (retired)
Graduate & Allied Health Admissions
Barry University*

Source: 2003 NAGAP Survey of Member Organizational Structures

A Good Admissions Office...

- **Uses resources efficiently**
 - Eliminates duplication of effort
 - Looks for economies of scale and good use of technology
- **Provides excellent customer service**
 - Minimizes applicant confusion and errors
 - Promptly responds to queries and facilitates prompt decision-making
 - Supports the needs and goals of faculty and departments
- **Maximizes quality and consistency**
 - Consistent admissions policies and procedures -- and exceptions
 - Ensures that data is reliable and secure
 - Communicates clearly and accurately with prospects and applicants
 - Maintains standards and professionalism
- **Has good leadership**
 - Promotes a shared vision, and a clear understanding of both short-term enrollment objectives and long-term strategic goals



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Graduate Admissions: Consistencies

- Admission decisions are based on the total application packet.
- Meeting minimum requirements does not guarantee admission.
- Decisions are intended to match the needs, interests, and competency level of students with the enrollment goals and educational priorities of the institution.



International Admissions

- A rapidly changing environment
 - Significant changes in higher education outside the U.S.:
 - The Bologna Process (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna/>)
 - Growing number of graduate programs abroad being taught in English.
 - More graduate programs and universities
 - Ease with which international student can work in the country after graduation
 - Strong national support for international student recruitment (British Council, AustraLearn, DAAD, Think Swiss)

- Recruiting international applicants has become more complicated.
 - Visa complexities & delays
 - Costs and financial support
 - U.S. foreign policy
 - Increased competition from abroad (see above)



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International Admissions

- The good news:
 - International applications are going up.
 - SEVIS and other visa processes have been fine-tuned and are working better than when originally implemented.
 - New initiatives to recruit international students are being developed by the federal government, professional associations, state systems, and individual institutions.
 - Although perceptions of the value and quality of academic programs in some countries have been fluctuating, the reputation of our universities and educational system has generally remained strong.



Equivalence vs. Admissibility vs. Admissions

- Equivalence compares the characteristics of a degree or program from one country with that of another.
- Admissibility is based on all factors likely to predict an applicant's success in a particular graduate program.
- Admissions decisions takes into account other variables:
 - The “fit” between an applicant's credentials, experience, and goals with the focus and expertise of the program.
 - Competitiveness of other applicants.
 - Institutional priorities, resources, and enrollment goals.
- **All are subjective determinations.**

Applicants can:

- Hold an equivalent degree but not be admissible or admitted.
- Be admitted without an equivalent degree.
- Be admissible but not be admitted.



Three-Year Bachelor's Degrees

- **The Bologna Process**
 - There is no one, single Bologna-compliant degree.
 - Each European credential must be evaluated on its own merits.
 - Experts in the field have differing opinions about equivalence/comparability with U.S. degrees.
- Years of education are not a consistent measure of preparation for graduate study, even in the U.S.
- Options for handling shorter-than-average degrees:
 - Evaluate them as equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree.
 - Waive the bachelor's degree requirement.
 - Bridge programs or conditional admission requiring supplemental coursework.
 - Require bachelor's plus a one-year master's degree.
 - Consider other factors (employment, research experience).
 - Make exceptions on a case-by-case basis – but document the basis for the exception to ensure they are applied fairly and consistently.



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Legal Issues In Graduate Admissions

Disclaimer: *Intended solely to heighten awareness of potential legal issues and is not a substitute for professional advice.*



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General Recommendations from a Layperson

1. Don't ask anything on an application, in an interview, or in informal communications that you don't need, can't justify, and/or won't use in the admission decision.
2. Don't act capriciously or arbitrarily.
3. Do not unjustifiably discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability or citizenship.
4. Adhere to published/stated admissions standards, policies, and criteria.
5. Base admissions decisions on the total application.
6. Consult university counsel.



Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA)

- Provides access rights of **admitted** students to their admission records; excludes confidential recommendations for which a valid waiver to the right of access has been signed by the student.
- **Admitted students** have the right to see comments written about them by admissions officers.
 - Includes documents kept separate from a student's permanent record.
 - Universities can destroy admissions comments once a student has been admitted, unless a student has requested access to the material prior to its destruction.
- FERPA does **not** apply to:
 - unsuccessful applicants;
 - applicants who do not enroll; or
 - applicants applying to a different program at an institution they have already attended.



Affirmative action “post-Michigan”

Two-part analysis in reviewing affirmative action programs:

1. Does it serve a compelling reason?

Only two compelling reasons clearly accepted by the courts to-date:

- To remedy present effects of prior discrimination.
- To achieve the educational benefits that come from racial/ethnic diversity in the classroom.

2. Is it narrowly tailored to serve this purpose?

Impermissible methods include:

- Using quotas (or numerical goals implemented in such a way that they effectively are quotas).
- Having separate review tracks for different applicant groups.
- Using race or ethnicity as the sole criterion for minority applicants.
- Automatically assigning a specific number of “admissions points” to members of certain racial or ethnic groups.



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Affirmative action “post-Michigan”

- Programs must be deemed necessary to achieve the goals: universities need to examine alternate methods other than race-consciousness.
- Institutions need to periodically re-evaluate programs to:
 - determine effectiveness;
 - confirm whether they are still needed; and
 - make refinements as appropriate.
- Race and ethnicity should be only one of many factors considered in the admission decision.
- Programs should involve all forms of diversity, not simply racial and ethnic diversity.
- State voter propositions and constitutional amendments.



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Future legal issues

- Virginia Law SB559/HD 984: Requires all higher education institutions physically located in Virginia to electronically transmit data on admitted students to the Virginia State Police to be checked against both state and federal sexual offender registry files.
- Federal attempts to prohibit institutions from categorically refusing to accept credits from a non-regionally accredited institution.
- Fallout from the Virginia Tech tragedy: state-mandated screening of applicants for mental/emotional problems?



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Recommendations to Avoid Common Problems in Graduate Admissions



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Admissions Applications

- Never include pre-admission inquiries about marital status or disabilities in the admission process.
- Carefully review all parts of your application and recruitment materials yearly.
- Include disclaimers such as:
 - The catalog is not a contract.
 - The information provided is accurate at the time of publication and may change without notice.
 - Not all courses are offered each academic year and faculty assignments may change.
- Require online applicants to take some affirmative step indicating they are bound by your signature language.



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Questions about Prior Criminal Records

- Can make pre-admission inquiries about prior criminal records, although some states prohibit discriminating against persons convicted for criminal offenses.
- Questions should be limited to convictions rather than charges or arrests.
- Decide how you're going to respond to this information -- involve university counsel.
- When making admissions decisions, consider:
 1. the nature of the criminal activity and its relationship to the intended program of study and the campus environment;
 2. the elapsed time since the crime was committed; and
 3. rehabilitation efforts of the applicant.



Admissions & Fellowship Decisions

- Don't waive published deadlines or admission requirements without clearly articulating the justification.
- Follow testing organizations' stated guidelines and policies for test-use.
- Have a written policy describing exactly who has the authority to make an offer of admission.
- When making conditional/provisional admits, clearly state the conditions of admission and timelines for compliance.
- Don't provide details in "deny" letters.
- **Don't give a single individual the power to accept or reject a candidate.**



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Data Confidentiality

- Don't release information about the status of an application over the phone or by e-mail.
- Everyone involved in the admissions process (faculty, staff, student workers, alumni) need to be informed about your confidentiality policies and required to sign confidentiality agreements.
- Have a clear policy about when an applicant is considered a student (and when FERPA will apply).



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Dealing with Fraud

1. Establish policies and processes to:

- Identify and verify inconsistencies, inaccuracies, or fraud in admissions materials
 - Internal validity (consistency throughout the application)
 - Spot-checks (randomly select an application for verification of recommenders, universities, employers, etc.)
 - Formal criminal background or resume checks
- Handle anonymous and other unofficial third-party sources of information about applicants.

2. Communicate with applicants.

- Make them aware of the importance of accuracy and honesty in their application.
 - Tell them that you may check on the accuracy of their submissions
 - Describe the consequences of incomplete or inaccurate information
- Notify applicants if independently obtained information will be included in their admissions files.
- Prompt follow-up on questionable application information.



Final Recommendations

- If exceptions are made to standard policies and processes, document them and be prepared to defend them and apply them to all applicants who meet the same conditions.
- Never let an admission decision be made by an individual -- use multiple reviewers and a two-tiered admission system.
- Hire professionals: graduate recruitment and admissions is a complicated, continually changing field.